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PRELUDES AND SYMPHONIES

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PRELUDES AND SYMPHONIES

BY

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

NEW YORK
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1930

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NOTE

THE present volume is a reissue of the author's two earlier books, *Irradiations; Sand and Spray* (1915) and *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916). Thanks are due to the editors of *Poetry* (Chicago), *The Egoist* (London), and *The Little Review* (New York) for permission to reprint certain of these poems that originally appeared in the pages of their respective publications.

PREFACE

In one of the Descriptive Catalogues of William Blake there occurs the phrase, 'the productions of our youth and of our maturer age are equal in all essential points'. The author of the book that follows is unable to apply the comfort of Blake's maxim to himself, for the reason that, in the opinion of some discerning critics, he has never equalled the poetry contained in its pages. And "Preludes and Symphonies" is the book of my youth; sixteen years having passed since it was conceived and fourteen since it was finished. Am I to admit that in all these years that have followed I have wavered in my aim to write the best poetry of which I was capable, or must I allow that by some accident, of which I was not conscious and fully responsible, these productions tapped some inner source in me that I have since been unable to attain?

The question has more than an academic and a purely personal interest. Most of the critics who hailed these poems when they appeared liked them precisely because they seemed to do something not done before. But that point has lost interest for me, now. We have had so many poets trying to outdo each other in the search for novel expression, in the last dozen years, that mere novel expression will not suffice as a criterion for poetry. But on re-reading the pages herein

contained, and particularly in the section entitled "Irradiations," I do feel a certain freshness of phraseology that at the present day I have to labor hard to recapture—if indeed I can entirely recapture it. With "Irradiations" I achieved completely something that I had been working towards, in obscurity and silence, for about five years: a presentation of daily life in terms of highly-orchestrated and coloured words. If poetry is a rendering of moods alone, and if you have to be in the mood for poetry before poetry can say anything to you, then "Irradiations" should satisfy many readers; and the "Symphonies," where each separate mood is not kept distinct but merges into its related and corresponding mood, should satisfy more. Since then I have tended increasingly to hold that poetry is also thought, and that thought and emotion play the part in poetry of counterpoint and melody in the works of musical composers. I still feel, in "Irradiations," the surge of an emotion vital enough to have transformed my existence, but I have to go back sixteen years before I can begin to explain it.

It all happened in the spring of 1913, in Paris. Except for two or three minor pieces, the whole of the first forty pages of this book was written then. At that time, I was just over twenty-six years of age and had spent the last five years of my life in London. "The New Poetry" had just begun to be talked about, on the other side of the Atlantic, and its first heralds, Lindsay, Masters, Sandburg, had scarcely made a stir. The Imagists, with whom later I was to affiliate myself, had not yet attained to the dignity of a collected anthology. I had only read the work of one of them, the

pioneer Ezra Pound. During the course of the month in which I was to finish "Irradiations," I was to make his acquaintance. My gods proved to be different from his: I depended on Whitman, Blake, Shelley, and the French Symbolists, while he preferred the remoter and perhaps purer sources of Anglo-Saxon, Provençal, and ancient Chinese inspiration. In "Irradiations" my dependence on the Symbolists is particularly marked. If the reader will turn to the pages of an almost forgotten book of symbolist verse, "Les Fêtes Quotidiennes" by Guy Charles Cros, published by the Mercure de France in 1912, he will find such phrases as "les écharpes violettes de la nuit tombent à plis legérs sur les epaules de la terre" and "les petits trilles polychromes des étoiles" which I imitated faithfully in "Irradiations." There are also echoes of Verhaeren strewn up and down these pages. I can only say in extenuation that every poet necessarily borrows something from other poets, just as every man is necessarily influenced in his life by his surroundings; and it is not the fact of such borrowings, but what is made out of them, that is important. In any case, "Irradiations" owes much to the Symbolist school. And the "Symphonies" owe still more.

Like the works of the Symbolists, these poems, despite the fact that they concerned themselves with everyday events and incidents, have all in common a certain aloofness to life. This I realise, though perhaps I did not realise it fully until Conrad Aiken in his "Scepticisms" pointed out their quality of "a detached waver and brilliance," and Edward Garnett in his "Friday Nights" referred to the pitfalls of the allusive

method. Had I been left to myself, I might have pursued this pathway to its end in endless heaping up of meaningless colour-patterns; being already encouraged towards that end by my friend, Miss Lowell, whose poetic evolution was, as she confessed herself, largely orientated and directed by the appearance of "Irradiations." Our friendship indeed, dated from the day I first read her the completed manuscript. I might not have undertaken the "Symphonies" at all had it not been for her sympathy and encouragement. They are, as I have already pointed out, examples of the use, or the abuse, of the *allusive* method (to borrow Garnett's phrase). My aim in them was to describe certain predominant moods in the terms of things happening. Thus one gets expectancy described as a traveller looking at blue mountains in the distance, and despair described in terms of a stoker on board a ship. Each mood was to be presented not as abstract sorrow or joy or rage, but as something seen, heard, felt, and actually happening. By these means, I approached close to that "methodical confusion of all the senses" which was described as the visionary state by no less a poet than Arthur Rimbaud.

In two respects, indeed, these "Symphonies" irritated many worthy critics of the time, and may still irritate some to-day. That was because to each of them I assigned a colour, and because their form seemed to be entirely shapeless. As regards the colour-title, my intentions in that respect have been greatly exaggerated. My friendly critics might have assured themselves, by a glance at Galton's "Inquiry Concerning Human Faculty" that colour-vision in certain states of excitement, is far more common than most people suppose;

and in poetry of this visual type, some indication of the prevailing mood seems to be necessary. My assignment of a colour to each "Symphony" was no more than an indication of my main intention. The charge against the form is less easily rebutted; but I have always felt it more important for a poet to create his form according to the state of his feelings and the condition of his material, than to borrow one ready-made and to attempt to squeeze his feelings in it. Only a few metrical forms are really of universal applicability, perhaps the sonnet and blank verse are the only forms in English that can be used indiscriminately by all poets without loss of quality. I may have pushed metrical variation too far towards anarchy; for having employed it in preference to uniformity, I still feel I owe neither explanation nor apology.

The "Symphonies" have had no direct successors in my later work. With the exception of the love poems contained in "The Tree of Life," upon which I began working before finishing the "Symphonies" and which are so arranged as to make the entire book a symphony, I have felt that this was a type of poetry that I, personally, could not develop farther. I have written since many works in the symphonic form of four or five contrasted movements; attentive readers will find some of them even in my latest book, "The Black Rock"—but I have been at pains to give them a more philosophic structure, and not merely sought to follow my mood wherever it led. That may be because the domain of the subconscious, with which these poems deal, is too readily exhausted, or it may be that the Great War succeeded in

modifying my ideas of poetry. In any case I have felt that whatever I succeeded in doing in the "Symphonies" could not be repeated in exactly the same way; which is far from saying that I believed the way partly shown by these poems to be a blind alley.

The value, then, of this book resides rather in its display of lyric temperament than in any ideas it may contain. It does not belong to that main branch of poetry, the branch that is pure folk-song, where are Homer and Chaucer, the authors of the Nibelungenlied and the Song of Roland, many a balladist, Burns and Heine, Wordsworth and Coleridge at their best. Neither can it be classed with the kind of poetry that presupposes a steadily-held philosophic background, the kind written by Lucretius and Dante, Goethe and Leopardi, Shelley, Blake, and more recently, Thomas Hardy. But perhaps there is still a third category of poetry, the kind of poetry that has nothing to justify it except its own eagerness for beauty, the kind of which "Endymion" provides a classic example. To that kind this book belongs. And whatever its value, I know that Imagism could not have been what it was, had not these poems been written. With that knowledge I rest content.

September, 1929.

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IRRADIATIONS

I

THE spattering of the rain upon pale terraces
Of afternoon is like the passing of a dream
Amid the roses shuddering 'gainst the wet green stalks
Of the streaming trees — the passing of the wind
Upon the pale lower terraces of my dream
Is like the crinkling of the wet grey robes
Of the hours that come to turn over the urn
Of the day and spill its rainy dream.
Vague movement over the puddled terraces:
Heavy gold pennons — a pomp of solemn gardens
Half hidden under the liquid veil of spring:
Far trumpets like a vague rout of faded roses
Burst 'gainst the wet green silence of distant forests:
A clash of cymbals — then the swift swaying footsteps
Of the wind that undulates along the languid terraces.
Pools of rain — the vacant terraces
Wet, chill and glistening
Towards the sunset beyond the broken doors of to-day.

II

GAUNT sails — bronze boats of the evening —
Float along the river where aloft
Like dim swans the clouds die
Softly.

I am afraid to traverse the long still streets of evening;
For I fear to see the ghosts that stare at me
From the shadows.
I will stay indoors instead and await my wandering dream.

She is about me, fluid yet, and formless;
The wind in her hair whispers like dim violins:
And the faint glint of her eyes shifts like a sudden move-
ment
Over the surface of a dark pool.

She comes to me slowly down the lost streets of the evening,
And their immutable silence is in her feet.
Let no lamps flare — be still, my heart — hands, stay:
For I would touch the lips of my new love with my lips.

III

In the grey skirts of the fog seamews skirl desolately,
And flick like bits of paper propelled by a wind
About the flabby sails of a departing ship
Crawling slowly down the low reaches
Of the river.
About the keel there is a bubbling and gurgling
Of grumpy water;
And as the prow noses out a way for itself,
It seems to weave a dream of bubbles and flashing foam,
A dream of strange islands whereto it is bound:
Pearl-islands drenched with the dawn.
The palms flash under the immense dark sky,
Down which the sun dives to embrace the earth:
Drums boom and conches bray,
And with a crash of crimson cymbals
Suddenly appears above the polished backs of slaves
A king in a breastplate of gold
Gigantic
Amid tossed roses and swaying dancers
That melt into pale undulations and muffled echoes
'Mid the bubbling of the muddy lumpy water,
And the swirling of the seamews above the sullen river.

IV

The iridescent vibrations of midsummer light,
Dancing, dancing, suddenly flickering and quivering
Like little feet or the movement of quick hands clapping,
Or the rustle of furbelows or the clash of polished gems.
The palpitant mosaic of the midday light
Colliding, sliding, leaping and lingering:
O, I could lie on my back all day,
And mark the mad ballet of the midsummer sky.

V

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of clouds;
Like horses the shadows of clouds charge down the street.

Whirlpools of purple and gold,
Winds from the mountains of cinnabar,
Lacquered mandarin moments, palanquins swaying and balancing
Amid the vermilion pavilions, against the jade balustrades.
Glint of the glittering wings of dragon-flies in the light:
Silver filaments, golden flakes settling downwards,
Rippling, quivering flutters, repulse and surrender,
The sun broidered upon the rain,
The rain rustling with the sun.

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of clouds;
Like horses the shadows of clouds charge down the street.

VI

THE balancing of gaudy broad pavilions
Of summer against the insolent breeze:
The bellying of the sides of stripèd tents,
Swelling taut, shuddering in quick collapse,
Silent under the silence of the sky.

Earth is streaked and spotted
With great splashes and dapples of sunlight:
The sun throws an immense circle of hot light upon the world,
Rolling slowly in ponderous rhythm
Darkly, musically forward.

All is silent under the steep cone of afternoon:
The sky is imperturbably profound.
The ultimate divine union seems about to be accomplished,
All is troubled at the attainment
Of the inexhaustible infinite.

The rolling and the tossing of the sides of immense pavilions
Under the whirling wind that screams up the cloudless sky.

VII

Flickering of incessant rain
On flashing pavements:
Sudden scurry of umbrellas:
Bending, recurved blossoms of the storm.

The winds came clanging and clattering
From long white highroads whipping in ribbons up summits:
They strew upon the city gusty wafts of apple-blossom,
And the rustling of innumerable translucent leaves.

Uneven tinkling, the lazy rain
Dripping from the eaves.

VIII

THE fountain blows its breathless spray
From me to you and back to me.

Whipped, tossed, curdled,
Crashing, quivering:
I hurl kisses like blows upon your lips.
The dance of a bee drunken with sunlight:
Irradiant ecstasies, white and gold,
Sigh and relapse.

The fountain tosses pallid spray
Far in the sorrowful, silent sky.

IX

THE houses of the city no longer hum and play:
They lie like careless drowsy giants, dumb, estranged.

One presses to his breast his toy, a lighted pane:
One stirs uneasily: one is cold in death.

And the late moon, fearfully peering over an immense
shoulder,
Sees, in the shadow below, the unpeopled hush of a street.

X

THE trees, like great jade elephants,
Chained, stamp and shake 'neath the gadflies of the breeze;
The trees lunge and plunge, unruly elephants:
The clouds are their crimson howdah-canopies,
The sunlight glints like the golden robe of a Shah.
Would I were tossed on the wrinkled backs of those trees.

XI

THE clouds are like a sombre sea:
On shining screens of ebony
Are carven marvels of my heart.

'Gainst crimson placques of cinnabar
Shrills, like a diamond, dawn's last star.

The gardens of my heart are green:
The rain drips off the glistening leaves.
In the humid gardens of my soul,
The crimson peonies explode.

I am like a drop of rose-flushed rain
Clinging to crimson petals of love.

In the afternoon, over gold screens,
I will brush the blue dust of my dreams.

XII

THE pine, rough-bearded Pan of the woods,
Whispered in my ear his sleepy-sweet song.
Like liquid fire it ran through my veins.
Thus he piped: Sad, lonely son of the woods,
Lie down in the long still grass and sleep,
Ere the dawn has hidden her swelling breasts,
Ere the morning has covered her massive flanks,
With the flame-coloured mantle of noon.
Lie down in the dewless grass nor awake
To see whether afternoon has hurried in
From the rim of her purple robe dropping dim flowers:
Golden flowers with pollen-dusty cups,
Flowers of silence. Heed not though eve
Should sail, a grey swan, in the pool of the sky,
Spreading low ripples. Heed these not!
Only awake when slim twilight
Plunges her body in the last blown spray of the sun!
Awake then, for twilight and dawn are your day:
Therefore lie down in the long dim grass and sleep,
And I will blow my low pipes over you.

XIII

As I went through the city by day
I saw shadows in sunlight:
But in the night I saw everywhere
Stars within the darkness.

(A coldly fluting breeze:
Dark Pan under the trees.
Low laughter: up the sky
A star like a street-lamp left on high.)

As I went through the city by day
I was hustled by jostling people.
But in the night, the wind of the darkness
Whispered, "Hush!" to my soul.

XIV

Brown bed of earth, still fresh and warm with love,
Now hold me tight:
Broad field of sky, where the clouds laughing move,
Fill up my pores with light:
You trees, now talk to me, chatter and scold or weep,
Or drowsing stand:
You winds, now play with me, you wild things creep,
You boulders, bruise my hand!
I now am yours and you are mine: it matters not
What Gods herein I see:
You grow in me, I am rooted to this spot,
We drink and pass the cup, immortally.

XV

O SEEDED grass, you army of little men
Crawling up the long slope with quivering, quick blades of steel:
You who storm millions of graves, tiny green tentacles of Earth,
Interlace yourselves tightly over my heart,
And do not let me go:
For I would lie here forever and watch with one eye
The pilgrimaging ants in your dull, savage jungles,
The while with the other I see the stiff lines of the slope
Break in mid-air, a wave surprisingly arrested,
And above them, wavering, dancing, bodiless, colourless, unreal,
The long thin lazy fingers of the heat.

XVI

An ant crawling up a grass-blade,
And above it, the sky.
I shall remember these when I die:
An ant and a butterfly
And the sky.

The grass is full of forget-me-nots and poppies:
Through the air darts many a fly.
The ant toils up its grass-blade,
The careless hours go by.

The grass-blades bow to the feet of the lazy hours:
They walk out of the wood, showering shadows on flowers.
Their robes flutter vaguely far off there in the clearing:
I see them sometimes from the corner of my eye.

XVII

THE wind that drives the fine dry sand
Across the strand:
The sad wind spinning arabesques
With a wrinkled hand.

Labyrinths of shifting sand,
The dancing dunes!

I will arise and run with the sand,
And gather it greedily in my hand:
I will wriggle like a long yellow snake over the beaches.
I will lie curled up, sleeping,
And the wind shall chase me
Far inland.

My breath is the music of the mad wind;
Shrill piping, stamping of drunken feet,
The fluttering, tattered broidery flung
Over the dunes' steep escarpments.

The fine dry sand that whistles
Down the long low beaches.

XVIII

BLUE. brown, blue: sky, sand, sea:
I swell to your immensity.
I will run over the endless beach,
I will shout to the breaking spray,
I will touch the sky with my fingers.
My happiness is like this sand:
I let it run out of my hand.

XIX

THE clouds pass
Over the polished mirror of the sky:
The clouds pass, puffs of grey,
There is no star.

The clouds pass slowly:
Suddenly a disengaged star flashes.
The night is cold and the clouds
Roll slowly over the sky.

XX

I DANCE:
I exist in motion:
A wind-shaken flower spilling my drops in the sunlight.

I feel the muscles bending, relaxing beneath me;
I direct the rippling sweep of the lines of my body;
Its impact crashes through the thin walls of the atmosphere,
I dance.

About me whirls
The sombre hall, the gaudy stage, the harsh glare of the footlights,
And in the brains of thousands watching
Little flames leap quivering to the music of my effort.

I have danced:
I have expressed my soul
In unbroken rhythm,
Sorrow and flame.
I am tired: I would be extinguished beneath your beating hands.

XXI

Not noisily, but solemnly and pale,
In a meditative ecstasy you entered life:
As performing some strange rite, to which you alone held the clue.
Child, life did not give rude strength to you;
From the beginning, you would seem to have thrown away,
As something cold and cumbersome, that armour men use against death.
You would perhaps look on him face to face, and so learn the secret
Whether that face wears oftenest a smile or no?
Strange, old, and silent being, there is something
Infinitely vast in your intense tininess:
I think you could point out, with a smile, some curious star
Far off in the heavens, which no man has seen before.

XXII

THE morning is clean and blue and the wind blows up the clouds:
Now my thoughts gathered from afar
Once again in their patched armour, with rusty plumes and blunted swords,
Move out to war.

Smoking our morning pipes we shall ride two and two
Through the woods.
For our old cause keeps us together,
And our hatred is so precious not death or defeat can break it.

God willing, we shall this day meet that old enemy
Who has given us so many a good beating.
Thank God we have a cause worth fighting for,
And a cause worth losing and a good song to sing.

XXIII

TORRIDLY the moon rolls upward
Against the smooth immensity of midsummer sky,
Changeless, inexhaustible :
The city beneath is still.
Heaven and Earth are clasped together,
Momently life grows as careless
As the life of the intense stars.
Out of the houses climbing,
Fuming up windows, flickering from every roof-top,
Rigid on sonorous pinnacles,
Silently swirl aloft
Love's infinite flamelets.

XXIV

O ALL you stars up yonder,
Do you hear me? Beautiful, winking, sullen eyes,
I am tired of seeing you in the same old places,
Night after night in the sky.
I hoped you would dance—but after twenty-six years,
I find you are determined to stay as you are.
So I make it known to you, stars clustered or solitary,
That I want you to fall into my lap to-night.
Come down, little stars, let me play with you:
I will string you like beads, and shovel you together,
And wear you in my ears, and scatter you over people—
And toss you back, like apples, if I choose.

XXV

As I wandered over the city through the night,
I saw many strange things:
But I have forgotten all
Except one painted face.
Gaudy, shameless night-orchid,
Heavy, flushed, sticky with narcotic perfume,
There was something in you which made me prefer you
Above all the feeble forget-me-nots of the world.
You were neither burnt out nor pallid,
There was plain, coarse, vulgar meaning in every line of you,
And no make-believe:
You were at least alive,
When all the rest were but puppets of the night.

XXVI

Slowly along the lamp-emblazoned street,
Amid the last sad drifting crowds of midnight
Like lost souls wandering,
Comes marching by solemnly
As for some gem-bedecked ritual of old,
A monotonous procession of black carts
Full crowded with blood-red blossom:
Scarlet geraniums
Unfolding their fiery globes upon the night.
These are the memories of day moulded in jagged flame:
Lust, joy, blood, and death.
With crushed hands, weary eyes, and hoarse clamour,
We consecrate and acclaim them tumultuously
Ere they pass, contemptuous, beyond the unpierced veil of silence.

XXVII

I THINK there was an hour in which God laughed at me,
For as I passed along the street,
I saw that all the women—although their bodies were dexterously concealed—
Were thinking with all their might what men were like:
And the men, mechanically correct, cigars at lips,
Were wanting to rush at the women,
But were restrained by respectability or timidity,
Or fear of the consequences or vanity or some puerile dream
Of a pale ideal lost in the vast grey sky.
So I said to myself, it is time to end all this:
I will take the first woman that comes along.
And then God laughed at me—and I too smiled
To see that He was in such good humour and that the sun was shining.

XXVIII

I REMEMBER, there was a day
During which I did not write a line of verse:
Nor did I speak a word to any woman,
Nor did I meet with death.

Yet all that day I was fully occupied:
My eyes saw trees, clouds, streets, houses, people;
My lungs breathed air;
My mouth swallowed food and drink;
My hands seized things, my feet touched earth,
Or spurned it at my desire.

On that day I know I would have been sufficiently happy,
If I could have kept my brain from bothering at all
About my next trite poem;
About the tedious necessities of sex;
And about the day on which I would at last meet death.

XXIX

It is evening, and the earth
Wraps her shoulders in an old blue shawl.
Afar off there clink the polychrome points of the stars,
Indefatigable, after all these years!
Here upon earth there is life, and then death,
Dawn, and later nightfall,
Fire, and the quenching of embers:
But why should I not remember that my night is dawn in another part of the world,
If the idea fits my fancy?
Dawns of marvellous light, wakeful, sleepy, weary, dancing dawns,
You are rose petals settling through the blue of my evening:
I light my pipe to salute you,
And sit puffing smoke in the air and never say a word.

XXX

I HAVE seemed often feeble and useless to myself,
And many times I have wished that the tedium of my life
Lay at last dissolved in the cold acid of death:
Yet I have not forgotten
The sparkling of waters in the sunlight,
The sound of a woman's voice,
Gliding dancers,
Chanting worshippers,
A child crying,
The wind amid the hills.
These I can remember,
And I think they are more of me
Than the wrinkles on my face and the hungry ache at my heart.

XXXI

My stiff-spread arms
Break into sudden gesture;
My feet seize upon the rhythm;
My hands drag it upwards:
Thus I create the dance.

I drink of the red bowl of the sunlight:
I swim through seas of rain:
I dig my toes into earth:
I taste the smack of the wind:
I am myself:
I live.

The temples of the gods are forgotten or in ruins:
Professors are still arguing about the past and the future:
I am sick of reading marginal notes on life,
I am weary of following false banners:
I desire nothing more intensely or completely than this present;
There is nothing about me you are more likely to notice than my being:
Let me therefore rejoice silently,
A golden butterfly glancing against an unflecked wall.

XXXII

To-day you shall have but little song from me,
For I belong to the sunlight.
This I would not barter for any kingdom.

I am a wheeling swallow,
Blue all over is my delight.
I am a drowsy grass-blade
In the greenest shadow.

XXXIII

My desire goes bristling and growling like an angry leopard;
My ribs are a hollow grating, my hair is coarse and hard,
My flanks are like sharp iron wedges, my eyes glitter as chill glass;
Down below there are the meadows where my famished hopes are feeding,
I will waylay them to windward, stalking in watchful patience,
I will pounce upon them, plunging my muzzle in the hot spurt of their blood.

XXXIV

THE flag let loose for a day of festivity;
Free desperate symbol of battle and desire,
Leaping, lunging, tossing up the halyards;
Below it a tumult of music,
Above it the streaming wastes of the sky,
Pinnacles of clouds, pyres of dawn,
Infinite effort, everlasting day.
The immense flag waving
Aloft in glory:
Over seas and hilltops
Transmitting its lightnings.

XXXV

WHAT weave you, what spin you,
What wonder win you,
You looms of desire?
Sin that is splendour,
Love that is shameless,
Life that is glory,
Life that is all.

XXXVI

LIKE cataracts that crash from a crumbling crag
Into the dull-blue smouldering gulf of a lake below,
Landlocked amid the mountains, so my soul
Was a gorge that was filled with the warring echoes of song.

Of old, they wore
Shining armour, and banners of broad gold they bore:
Now they drift, like a wild bird's cry,
Downwards from chill summits of the sky.
Fountains of flashing joy were their source afar;
Now they lie still, to mirror every star.
In circles of opal, ruby, blue, out-thrown,
They drift down to a dull, dark monotone.

Pluck the loose strings, singer,
Thrum the strings;
For the wind brings distant, drowsy bells of song.
Loose the plucked string, poet,
Spurn the strings,
For the echoes of memory float through the gulf for long.

My songs seem now one humming note afar:
Light as ether, quivering 'twixt star and star,

But yet, so still
I know not whence they come, if mine they are.
Yet that low note
Increases in force as if it said, "I will":
Kindled by God's fierce breath, it would the whole world fill.
Till steadily outwards thrown,
By trumpets blazoned, from the sky downblown,
It grows a vast march, massive, monotonous, known
Of old gold trumpeteers
Through infinite years:
Bursting the white, thronged vaults of the cool sky.
Till hurtling down there falls one mad black hammer-blow:
Then the chained echoes in their maniac woe
Are loosed against the silence, to shriek uncannily.

The strings shiver faintly, poet:
Strike the strings,
Speed the song:
Tremulous upward rush of wheeling, whirling wings.

EPILOGUE

THE barking of little dogs in the night is more remembered
than the shining of the stars:
Only those who watch for long may see the moon rise:
And they are mad ever after and go with blind eyes
Nosing hungrily in the gutter for the scraps that men throw
to the dogs;
Few heed their babblings.

SAND AND SPRAY

A Sea-Symphony

Part I. THE GALE

Allegro furioso.

Pale green-white, in a gallop across the sky,
The clouds retreating from a perilous affray
Carry the moon with them, a heavy sack of gold;
Sharp arrows, stars between them shoot and play.

The wind, as it strikes the sand,
Clutches with rigid hands
And tears from them
Thin ribbons of pallid sleet,
Long stinging hissing drift,
Which it trails up inland.

I lean against the bitter wind:
My body plunges like a ship.
Out there I see grey breakers rise,
Their ravelled beards are white,
And foam is in their eyes.
My heart is blown from me to-night
To be transfixed by all the stars.

Steadily the wind
Rages up the shore:

In the trees it roars and battles,
With rattling drums
And heavy spears,
Towards the house-fronts on it comes.

The village, a loose mass outflung,
Breaks its path.
Between the walls
It bounces, tosses in its wrath.
It is broken, it is lost.

With green-grey eyes,
With whirling arms,
With clashing feet,
With bellowing lungs,
Pale green-white in a gallop across the sky,
The wind comes.

The great gale of the winter flings himself flat upon earth.

He hurriedly scribbles on the sand
His transient tragic destiny.

Part II. VARIATIONS

(1) SAILBOATS

Scherzando.

Light as thin-winged swallows pirouetting and gyrating,
The sails dance in the estuary:
Now heeling to the gust, now cantering,
Bobbing as shuttles back and forth from each other.
They scorn the black steamers that steadily near them
On a course direct, with white spume of smoke from their bows,
With snapping crash of breakers they fling themselves forward:
Black on the wing-tips, white on the underside.
These are the birds of the land breeze,
Nesting on green waves in the gold sunlight:
These are the sailships
Heeling and tossing about in the estuary.

(2) THE TIDE

Con moto ondeggiante.

THE tide makes music
At the foot of the beach;
The waves sing together,
Rumble of breakers.
Ships there are swaying
Into the distance,
Thrum of the cordage,
Slap of the sails.

The tide makes music
At the foot of the beach;
Low notes of an organ
'Gainst the dull clang of bells.
The tide 's tense purple
On the untrodden sand:
Its throat is blue,
Its hands are gold.

The tide makes music:
The tide all day
Catches light from the clouds
That float over the sky.

Ocean, old serpent,
Coils up and uncoils;
With sinuous motion,
With rustle of scales.

(3) THE SANDS

Lento: appassionato.

SHALLOW pools of water
Are drinking up the sky;
Chasms of cool blue-white
In the brown of the sands.
The clouds are in them,
The houses on the shore,
The winds rumple the even
Glimmer of the reflection.

I dash across those shallow pools:
Starring their gauzy surface:
A plopping rush of bubbles:
I turn and watch my boot-tracks
Oozing upwards slowly in the dark wind-wrinkled sand.

(4) THE GULLS

Molto Allegro.

WHITE stars scattering,
Pale rain of spray-drops,
Delicate flash of smoke wind-drifted low and high,
Silver upon dark purple,
The gulls quiver
In a noiseless flight, far out across the sky.

(5) STEAMERS

Maestoso.

LIKE black plunging dolphins with red bellies,
The steamers in herds
Swim through the choppy breakers
On this day of winds and clouds.
Wallowing and plunging,
They seek their path,
The smoke of their snorting
Hangs in the sky.

Like black plunging dolphins with red bellies,
The steamers pass,
Flapping their propellers
Salt with the spray.
Their iron sides glisten,
Their stays thrash:
Their funnels quiver
With the heat from beneath.

Like black plunging dolphins with red bellies,
The steamers together
Dive and roll through the tumult
Of green hissing water.

These are the avid of spoil,
Gleaners of the seas,
They loom on their adventure
Up purple and chrome horizons.

(6) NIGHT OF STARS

Allegro brillante.

THE sky immense, bejewelled with rain of stars,
Hangs over us:
The stars like a sudden explosion powder the zenith
With green and gold;
North-east, south-west, the Milky Way's pale streamers
Flash past in flame;
The sky is a swirling cataract
Of fire, on high.

Over us the sky up to the zenith
Palpitates with tense glitter:
About our keel the foam bubbles and curdles
In phosphorescent joy.
Flame boils up to meet down-rushing flame
In the blue stillness.
Aloft a single orange meteor
Crashes down the sky.

Part III. VARIATIONS

(1) THE GROUNDSWELL

Marcia Funebre.

With heavy doleful clamour, hour on hour, and day on day,
The muddy groundswell lifts and breaks and falls and slides away.

The cold and naked wind runs shivering over the sands,
Salt are its eyes, open its mouth, its brow wet, blue its hands.

It finds naught but a starving gull whose wings trail at its side,
And the dull battered wreckage, grey jetsam of the tide.

The lifeless chilly slaty sky with no blue hope is lit,
A rusty waddling steamer plants a smudge of smoke on it.

Stupidly stand the factory chimneys staring over all,
The grey grows ever denser, and soon the night will fall:

The wind runs sobbing over the beach and touches with its hands
Straw, chaff, old bottles, broken crates, the litter of the sands.

Sometimes the bloated carcase of a dog or fish is found,
Sometimes the rumpled feathers of a sea-gull shot or drowned.

Last year it was an unknown man who came up from the sea,
There is his grave hard by the dunes under a stunted tree.

With heavy doleful clamour, hour on hour, and day on day,
The muddy groundswell lifts and breaks and falls and slides away.

(2) SNOW AT SEA

Andante.

SILENTLY fell
The snow on the waters
In the grey dusk
Of the winter evening:
Swirling and falling,
Sucked into the oily
Blue-black surface
Of the sea.

We pounded on slowly;
From our bows sheeted
A shuddering mass of heavy foam:
Night closed about us,
But ere we were darkened,
We saw close in
A great gaunt schooner
Beating to southward.

Silently fell
The snow on the waters,
As we pounded north
In the winter evening.

(3) THE NIGHT WIND

Adagio lamentoso.

WIND of the night, wind of the long cool shadows,
Wind from the garden gate stealing up the avenue,
Wind caressing my cool pale cheek completely,
All my happiness goes out to you.

Wind flapping aimlessly at my yellow window curtain,
Wind suddenly insisting on your way down to the sea,
Buoyant wind, sobbing wind, wind shuddering and plaintive,
Why come you from beyond through the night's blue mystery?

Wind of my dream, wind of the delicate beauty,
Wind strumming idly at the harp-strings of my heart:
Wind of the autumn—O melancholy beauty,
Touch me once—one instant—you and I shall never part!

Wind of the night, wind that has fallen silent,
Wind from the dark beyond crying suddenly, eerily,
What terrible news have you shrieked out there in the stillness?
The night is cool and quiet and the wind has crept to sea.

(4) THE WRECK

Grave: triste.

Its huge red prow
Uplifted in a tragic attitude,
It waits out there; the seas around
Bubble and hiss with moaning sound:
In sight of port at the gates of the sea,
It waits upreared expectantly.

It has known the joy of battle,
It has known the shock of wreck:
The spray coated its planking,
The sands swallow its deck:
Monument of the sea,
That knows and that forgets eternally.

It heaves its scarred brow towards the city:
The city pays it little heed:
Indifferent, brutal, without pity,
Stern cargo-steamers trudge and speed;
The sun glares on it and the gulls wheel and flash,
The rain beats on its deck, the winds pass silently;
It is out there alone with the immense sea:
Alone with its forgotten tragedy.

(5) TIDE OF STORMS

Allegro con fuoco.

CROOKED, crawling tide with long wet fingers
Clutching at the gritty beach in the roar and spurt of spray,
Tide of gales, drunken tide, lava-burst of breakers,
Black ships plunge upon you from sea to sea away.

Shattering tide, tide of winds, tide of the long still winter,
What matter though ships fail, men sink, there vanish glory?
War-clouds shall hurl their stinging sleet upon our last
adventure,
Night-winds shall brokenly whisper our bitter, tragic story.

Part IV. THE CALM

Largo.

In the morning I saw three great ships,
Almost motionless,
Becalmed on an infinite horizon.

The clatter of waves up the beach,
The grating rush of wet pebbles,
The loud monotonous song of the surf.
All these have soothed me
And have given
My soul to rest.

At noon I shall see waves flashing,
White power of spray.

The steamers, stately,
Kick up white puffs of spray behind them.
The boiling wake
Merges in the blue-black mirror of the sea.

One eye of the sun sees all:
The world, the wave, my heart.
I am content.

SAND AND SPRAY

In the afternoon I shall dream a dream
Of islands beyond the horizon.

White clouds drift over the sky,
Frigates on a long voyage.

In the evening a mute blue stillness
Clutches at my heart.
Stars sparkle upon the tips of my fingers.

Mystical hush,
Fire in the darkness;
The breaking of dreams.

But in the morning I shall see three great ships,
Almost motionless,
Becalmed on an infinite horizon.

SECTION I

THE GHOSTS OF AN OLD HOUSE

PROLOGUE

THE house that I write of, faces the north:
No sun ever seeks
Its six white columns,
The nine great windows of its face.

It fronts foursquare the winds.

Under the penthouse of the veranda roof,
The upper northern rooms
Gloom outwards mournfully.

Staring Ionic capitals
Peer in them:
Owl-like faces.

On winter nights
The wind, sidling round the corner,
Shoots upwards
With laughter.

The windows rattle as if some one were in them
wishing to get out
And ride upon the wind.

THE GHOSTS OF AN OLD HOUSE

Doors lead to nowhere:
Squirrels burrow between the walls.
Closets in every room hang open,
Windows are stared into by uncivil ancient trees.

In the middle of the upper hallway
There is a great circular hole
Going up to the attic.
A wooden lid covers it.

All over the house there is a sense of futility;
Of minutes dragging slowly
And repeating
Some worn-out story of broken effort and desire.

PART I. THE HOUSE

BEDROOM

THE clump of jessamine
Softly beneath the rain
Rocks its golden flowers.

In this room my father died:
His bed is in the corner.
No one has slept in it
Since the morning when he wakened
To meet death's hands at his heart.
I cannot go to this room,
Without feeling something big and angry
Waiting for me
To throw me on the bed,
And press its thumbs in my throat.

The clump of jessamine
Without, beneath the rain,
Rocks its golden flowers.

LIBRARY

Stuffy smell of mouldering leather,
Tattered arm-chairs, creaking doors,
Books that slovenly elbow each other,
Sown with children's scrawls and long
Worn out by contact with generations:
Tattered tramps displaying yourselves —
" We, though you broke our backs, did not complain."
If I had my way,
I would take you out and bury you quickly,
Or give you to the clean fire.

INDIAN SKULL

Some one dug this up and brought it
To our house.
In the dark upper hall, I see it dimly,
Looking at me through the glass.

Where dancers have danced, and weary people
Have crept to their bedrooms in the morning,
Where sick people have tossed all night,
Where children have been born,
Where feet have gone up and down,
Where anger has blazed forth, and strange looks
have passed,

It has rested, watching meanwhile
The opening and shutting of doors,
The coming and going of people,
The carrying out of coffins.

Earth still clings to its eye-sockets,
It will wait, till its vengeance is accomplished.

OLD NURSERY

In the tired face of the mirror
There is a blue curtain reflected.
If I could lift the reflection,
Peer a little beyond, I would see
A boy crying
Because his sister is ill in another room
And he has no one to play with:
A boy listlessly scattering building blocks,
And crying,
Because no one will build for him the palace of
Fairy Morgana.
I cannot lift the curtain:
It is stiff and frozen.

THE BACK STAIRS

In the afternoon
When no one is in the house,
I suddenly hear dull dragging feet
Go fumbling down those dark back stairs,
That climb up twisting,
As if they wanted no one to see them.
Beating a dirge upon the bare planks
I hear those feet and the creak of a long-locked door.

My mother often went
Up and down those selfsame stairs,
From the room where by the window
She would sit all day and listlessly
Look on the world that had destroyed her,
She would go down in the evening
To the room where she would sleep,
Or rather, not sleep, but all night
Lie staring fiercely at the ceiling.

In the afternoon
When no one is in the house:
I suddenly hear dull dragging feet
Beating out their futile tune,
Up and down those dark back stairs,
But there is no one in the shadows.

THE WALL CABINET

Above the steep back stairs
So high that only a ladder can come to it,
There is a wall cabinet hidden away.

No one ever unlocks it;
The key is lost, the door is barred,
It is shut and still.

Some say, a previous tenant
Filled its shelves with rows of bottles,
Bottles of spirit, filled with spiders.

I do not know.
Above the sleepy still back stairs,
It watches, shut and still.

THE CELLAR

Faintly lit by a high-barred grating,
The low-hung cellar,
Flattens itself under the house.

In one corner
There is a little door,
So low, it can scarcely be seen.

Beyond,
There is a narrow room,
One must feel for the walls in the dark.

One shrinks to go
To the end of it,
Feeling the smooth cold wall.

Why did the builders who made this house,
Stow one room away like this?

THE FRONT DOOR

It was always the place where our farewells were taken,
When we travelled to the north.

I remember there was one who made some journey,
But did not come back.
Many years they waited for him,
At last the one who wished the most to see him,
Was carried out of this selfsame door in death.

Since then all our family partings
Have been at another door.

PART II. THE ATTIC

IN THE ATTIC

Dust hangs clogged so thick
The air has a dusty taste:
Spider threads cling to my face,
From the broad pine-beams.
There is nothing living here,
The house below might be quite empty,
No sound comes from it.
The old broken trunks and boxes,
Cracked and dusty pictures,
Legless chairs and shattered tables,
Seem to be crying
Softly in the stillness
Because no one has brushed them.
No one has any use for them, now,
Yet I often wonder
If these things are really dead:
If the old trunks never open
Letting out grey flapping things at twilight?
If it is all as safe and dull
As it seems?

Why then is the stair so steep,
Why is the doorway always locked,
Why does nobody ever come?

THE CALENDAR IN THE ATTIC

I wonder how long it has been
Since this old calendar hung here,
With my birthday date upon it,
Nothing else — not a word of writing —
Not a mark of any hand.

Perhaps it was my father
Who left it thus
For me to see.

Perhaps my mother
Smiled as she saw it;
But in later years did not smile.

If I could tear it down,
From the wall
Somehow
I would be content.
But I am afraid, as a little child, to touch it.

THE HOOPSKIRT

In the night when all are sleeping,
Up here a tiny old dame comes tripping,
Looking for her lost hoopskirt.

My great-grandaunt — I never saw her —
Her ghost does n't know me from another,
She stalks up the attic stairs angrily.

The dust sets her sneezing and coughing,
By the trunk she is limping and hopping,
But alas — the trunk is locked.

What 's an old dame to do, anyway!
Must stay in a mouldy grave day on day,
Or go to heaven out of style.

In the night when all are snoring,
The old lady makes a dreadful clatter,
Going down the attic stairs.

What was that? A ghost or a burglar?
Oh, it was only the wind in the chimney,
Yes, and the attic door that slammed.

THE LITTLE CHAIR

I know not why, when I saw the little chair,
I suddenly desired to sit in it.

I know not why, when I sat in the little chair,
Everything changed, and life came back to me.

I am convinced no one at all has grown up in the house,
The break that I dreamed, itself was a dream and is broken.

I will sit in the little chair and wait,
Till the others come looking after me.

And if it is after nightfall they will come,
So much the better.

For the little chair holds me as tightly as death;
And rocking in it, I can hear it whisper strange things.

IN THE DARK CORNER

I brush the dust from this old portrait:
Yes, it is the same face, exactly,
Why does it look at me still with such a look of hate?

THE ATTIC

I brush the dust from a heap of magazines:
Here there is all what you have written,
All that you struggled long years and went down
to darkness for.

O God, to think what I am writing
Will be ever as this!

O God, to think that my own face
May some day glare from this dust!

THE TOY CABINET

By the old toy cabinet,
I stand and turn over dusty things:
Chessmen — card games — hoops and balls —
Toy rifles, helmets, swords,
In the far corner
A doll's tea-set in a box.

Where are you, golden child,
Who gave tea to your dolls and me?
The golden child is growing old,
Further than Rome or Babylon
From you have passed those foolish years.
She lives — she suffers — she forgets.

By the old toy cabinet,
I idly stand and awkwardly
Finger the lock of the tea-set box.
What matter — why should I look inside,
Perhaps it is empty after all!
Leave old things to the ghosts of old;

My stupid brain refuses thought,
I am maddened with a desire to weep.

THE YARDSTICK

Yardstick that measured out so many miles
of cloth,
Yardstick that covered me,
I wonder do you hop of nights
Out to the still hill-cemetery,
And up and down go measuring
A clayey grave for me?

PART III. THE LAWN

THE THREE OAKS

THERE are three ancient oaks,
That grow near to each other.

They lift their branches
High as beckoning
With outstretched arms,
For some one to come and stand
Under the canopy of their leaves.

Once long ago I remember
As I lay in the very centre,
Between them:
A rotten branch suddenly fell
Near to me.

I will not go back to those oaks:
Their branches are too black for my liking.

AN OAK

Hoar mistletoe
Hangs in clumps
To the twisted boughs
Of this lonely tree.

Beneath its roots I often thought treasure was buried:
For the roots had enclosed a circle.

But when I dug beneath them,
I could only find great black ants
That attacked my hands.

When at night I have the nightmare,
I always see the eyes of ants
Swarming from a mouldering box of gold.

ANOTHER OAK

Poison ivy crawls at its root,
I dare not approach it,
It has an air of hate.

One would say a man had been hanged to its branches,
It holds them in such a way.

THE LAWN

The moon gets tangled in it,
A distant steeple seems to bark
From its belfry to the sky.

Something that no one ever loved,
Is buried here:
Some grey shape of deadly hate,
Crawls on the back fence just beyond.

Now I remember — once I went
Out by night too near this oak,
And a red cat suddenly leapt
From the dark and clawed my face.

THE OLD BARN

Owls flap in this ancient barn
With rotted doors.

Rats squeak in this ancient barn
Over the floors.

Owls flap warily every night,
Rats' eyes gleam in the cold moonlight.

There is something hidden in this barn,
With barred doors.

Something the owls have torn,
And the rats scurry with over the floors.

THE WELL

The well is not used now,
Its waters are tainted.

I remember there was once a man went down
To clean it.
He found it very cold and deep,
With a queer niche in one of its sides,
From which he hauled forth buckets of bricks and dirt.

THE TREES

When the moonlight strikes the tree-tops,
The trees are not the same.

I know they are not the same,
Because there is one tree that is missing,
And it stood so long by another,
That the other, feeling lonely,
Now is slowly dying too.

When the moonlight strikes the tree-tops
That dead tree comes back;
Like a great blue sphere of smoke
Half buoyed, half ravelling on the grass,
Rustling through frayed branches,
Something eerily cheeping through it,
Something creeping through its shade.

VISION

You who flutter and quiver
An instant
Just beyond my apprehension;
Lady,
I will find the white orchid for you,
If you will but give me
One smile between those wayward drifts of hair.

I will break the wild berries that loop themselves over
the marsh-pool,
For your sake,
And the long green canes that swish against each other,
I will break, to set in your hands.
For there is no wonder like to you,
You who flutter and quiver
An instant
Just beyond my apprehension.

EPILOGUE

WHY it was I do not know,
But last night I vividly dreamed
Though a thousand miles away,
That I had come back to you.

The windows were the same:
The bed, the furniture the same,
Only there was a door where empty wall had
always been,
And someone was trying to enter it.

I heard the grate of a key,
An unknown voice apologetically
Excused its intrusion just as I awoke.

But I wonder after all
If there was some secret entrance-way,
Some ghost I overlooked, when I was there.

SECTION II

SYMPHONIES

BLUE SYMPHONY

I

The darkness rolls upward.
The thick darkness carries with it
Rain and a ravel of cloud.
The sun comes forth upon earth.

Palely the dawn
Leaves me facing timidly
Old gardens sunken:
And in the gardens is water.

Sombre wreck — autumnal leaves;
Shadowy roofs
In the blue mist,
And a willow-branch that is broken.

Oh, old pagodas of my soul, how you glittered
across green trees!

Blue and cool:
Blue, tremulously,
Blow faint puffs of smoke

Across sombre pools.
The damp green smell of rotted wood;
And a heron that cries from out the water.

II

Through the upland meadows
I go alone.
For I dreamed of someone last night
Who is waiting for me.

Flower and blossom, tell me, do you know of her?

Have the rocks hidden her voice?
They are very blue and still.

Long upward road that is leading me,
Light hearted I quit you,
For the long loose ripples of the meadow-grass
Invite me to dance upon them.

Quivering grass
Daintily poised
For her foot's tripping.

Oh, blown clouds, could I only race up like you,
Oh, the last slopes that are sun-drenched and steep!

Look, the sky!
Across black valleys
Rise blue-white aloft
Jagged unwrinkled mountains, ranges of death.

Solitude. Silence.

III

One chuckles by the brook for me:
One rages under the stone.
One makes a spout of his mouth
One whispers — one is gone.

One over there on the water
Spreads cold ripples
For me
Enticingly.

The vast dark trees
Flow like blue veils
Of tears
Into the water.

Sour sprites,
Moaning and chuckling,
What have you hidden from me?

"In the palace of the blue stone she lies forever
Bound hand and foot."

Was it the wind
That rattled the reeds together?

Dry reeds,
A faint shiver in the grasses.

IV

On the left hand there is a temple:
And a palace on the right-hand side.
Foot passengers in scarlet
Pass over the glittering tide.

Under the bridge
The old river flows
Low and monotonous
Day after day.

I have heard and have seen
All the news that has been:
Autumn's gold and Spring's green!

Now in my palace
I see foot passengers

Crossing the river :
Pilgrims of autumn
In the afternoons.

Lotus pools:
Petals in the water.
These are my dreams.

For me silks are outspread.
I take my ease, unthinking.

V

And now the lowest pine-branch
Is drawn across the disk of the sun.
Old friends who will forget me soon,
I must go on,
Towards those blue death-mountains
I have forgot so long.

In the marsh grasses
There lies forever
My last treasure,
With the hopes of my heart.

The ice is glazing over,
Torn lanterns flutter,
On the leaves is snow.

SYMPHONIES

In the frosty evening
Toll the old bell for me
Once, in the sleepy temple.

Perhaps my soul will hear.

Afterglow:
Before the stars peep
I shall creep out into darkness.

SOLITUDE IN THE CITY

(Symphony in Black and Gold)

I

WORDS AT MIDNIGHT

BECAUSE the night is so still,
Because there is no one about,
Not the tiny squeak of a mouse over the carpet,
Nor the slow beat of a clock at the top of the stairway,
I am afraid of the night that is coming to me.

I know out there
Some one is thinking of me, some one is wondering about me,
Some one is needing me, some one is dying for my sake,
Yet I remain alone.

I know that life is calling: I cannot resist it:
Too much of myself I have given ever to turn away,
I know that shame, sickness, death itself shall befall me,
And I am afraid.

O night, hide me in your long cold arms:
Let me sleep, but let me not live this life!

There are too many people with haggard eyes standing
before me
Saying, "To live you must suffer even as we."

Yet life bitterly bids me: "Go on to the last,
No matter the mud and the cold rain and the darkness:
No matter the drear pilgrims in whose eyes you shall look
for long,
And see all suffering, madness, death and despair."

Because my heart is cramped in,
Because I have suffered much,
Because my hope is like a candle-flame quenched at
midnight,
Because I dare dream yet of joy,
I can take my night and the life that is coming to me.

II

THE EVENING RAIN

O the rain of the evening is an infinite thing,
As it slowly slips on the motionless pavement;
Greasy and grey is the rain of the evening,
As it dribbles into the dirty gutters
And slides down the drains with a roar!

SOLITUDE IN THE CITY

Ragged men cower
Under the doorways:
Umbrellas nod like drowsy birds.
Bat-umbrellas,
Teetering, balancing,
Where will you spread your wings to-night?

Tangled between the factory-chimneys,
I have seen the golden lamps wake this evening:
Spinning and whirling, darting and dancing,
Tangled with the glittering rain.

Omnibuses lurch
Heavily homeward
Elephants tinselled in tawdry gold:
Taxicabs fight
Like wild birds squalling,
Wild birds with roaring, clattering wings.

O the rain of the evening is an infinite thing,
As it shivers to jewel-heaps spilt on the pavement.
The façades frown gloomily at its beauty,
The façades are dreaming of the day.

With rippling, curling,
Serpentine convolutions

The pavements drip with drunken light.
Crimson and gold,
Shot with opal,
They glare against the sullen night.

O the rain of the evening is an infinite thing
As it slowly dries on the dirty pavement.
Red low-browed clouds jut over the sky:
And in the cool sky there are stars.

III

STREET OF SORROWS

You street of sorrows bending
Over your golden lamps in the evening;
Dark street that is very silent,
And everywhere the same:
Elsewhere there is song and riot,
Like golden fireflies flickering,
Elsewhere the crane's gaunt muscles
Tug the city up to the stars.

But who in the dawn should come near you?
There are dry leaves rattling behind him.
And who should come in the noonday?
There are shadows that squat on the pave.

And who should come in the evening?
There is one: a ship in dark waters.
And who should come at nightfall,
To feel cold hands at his heart?

You street of solitude waiting
Patient and still in the evening:
Old street that is very weary,
And everywhere the same;
You that have seen joy passing.
Into pain, into tears, into darkness,
Street of the dead and musty,
I have drunk your cold poison to-night.

IV

SONG IN THE DARKNESS

It is the last night that I can be solitary:
Henceforth the keys and wards of me are held in other hands.

Dark clouds trail over the sky:
Troops of song retreating:
But in the sunset
Once more have I seen aloft
Incredible summits of gold, far on the south horizon.

One purple veil of rain
Floats downward over the city;
And as it settles slowly
The light goes out of it.

Chimneys with massive summits
Stand gaunt and black and evil:
Like a river of lead, to seaward
The river steadily rolls.

It is the last night that I can be solitary:
Life takes me in black coils.

One green light glitters:
Then a swift taxi
Scatters another
As it speeds on.

The chimneys rank
Their motionless forces
Against the swift movement
Of tugs in the stream;
Against the flame-chariots
Of the Embankment;
Against the bowing trees,

Against the blowing smoke,
Against the busy rain.

With dying might
The light invades
The city's hall:
Curtained by dripping fringes
Of buoyant tattered cloud,
Tossed by the wind.

It is the last night that I can be solitary;
And all my city of dreams is burning up to-night.

But yet there waits for me something lost back in the darkness:
Something I have never seized: a shape, a voice, a gesture,
Something behind my shoulder: grey robes that stir and rustle.
Something that moves away from me when I would touch it with my hand.

Cities of the beyond, what great black-walled horizons
Dare you climb up, and down what steep incredible valleys?
I suddenly perceive that I have been mocked in you,
And therefore will I sow the earth with rain of stars to-night.

It is the last night that I can be solitary ;
The rain invites to drunkenness: the wind blows
through my brain.

Shiplike the sliding golden trams
Procession by and intercross :
With tulips, daffodils, crocuses
The whole street blossoms at my feet:
Now kindle, flames, and let blow out
The crimson rose against the grey,
Let night itself be blotted out
In life's monotonous drone of day.

It is the last night that I can be solitary:
It is the last time that no feet
But mine can beat upon the floor;
It is the last time that no hands
But mine can pound upon my heart;
It is the last time that no voice
But mine can cry and yet be lost;
It is the last time I shall see
The pavements like a mirror stare at me.

GREEN SYMPHONY

I

THE glittering leaves of the rhododendrons
Balance and vibrate in the cool air;
While in the sky above them
White clouds chase each other.

Like scampering rabbits,
Flashes of sunlight sweep the lawn;
They fling in passing
Patterns of shadow,
Golden and green.

With long cascades of laughter,
The mating birds dart and swoop to the turf:
'Mid their mad trillings
Glints the gay sun behind the trees.

Down there are deep blue lakes:
Orange blossom droops in the water.

In the tower of the winds,
All the bells are set adrift:

Jingling
For the dawn.

Thin fluttering streamers
Of breeze lash through the swaying boughs,
Palely expectant
The earth receives the slanting rain.

I am a glittering raindrop
Hugged close by the cool rhododendron.
I am a daisy starring
The exquisite curves of the close-cropped turf.

The glittering leaves of the rhododendron
Are shaken like blue-green blades of grass,
Flickering, cracking, falling:
Splintering in a million fragments.

The wind runs laughing up the slope
Stripping off handfuls of wet green leaves,
To fling in peoples' faces.
Wallowing on the daisy-powdered turf,
Clutching at the sunlight,
Cavorting in the shadow.

Like baroque pearls,
Like cloudy emeralds,
The clouds and the trees clash together;
Whirling and swirling,
In the tumult
Of the spring,
And the wind.

II

The trees splash the sky with their fingers,
A restless green rout of stars.

With whirling movement
They swing their boughs
About their stems:
Planes on planes of light and shadow
Pass among them,
Opening fanlike to fall.

The trees are like a sea;
Tossing;
Trembling,
Roaring,
Wallowing,
Darting their long green flickering fronds up at the sky,
Spotted with white blossom-spray.

The trees are roofs:
Hollow caverns of cool blue shadow,
Solemn arches
In the afternoons.
The whole vast horizon
In terrace beyond terrace,
Pinnacle above pinnacle,
Lifts to the sky
Serrated ranks of green on green.

They caress the roofs with their fingers,
They sprawl about the river to look into it;
Up the hill they come
Gesticulating challenge:
They cower together
In dark valleys;
They yearn out over the fields.

Enamelled domes
Tumble upon the grass,
Crashing in ruin
Quiet at last.

The trees lash the sky with their leaves,
Uneasily shaking their dark green manes.

III

Far let the voices of the mad wild birds be calling me,
I will abide in this forest of pines.

When the wind blows
Battling through the forest,
I hear it distantly,
The crash of a perpetual sea.

When the rain falls,
I watch silver spears slanting downwards
From pale river-pools of sky,
Enclosed in dark fronds.

When the sun shines,
I weave together distant branches till they enclose
mighty circles,
I sway to the movement of hooded summits,
I swim leisurely in deep blue seas of air.

I hug the smooth bark of stately red pillars
And with cones carefully scattered
I mark the progression of dark dial-shadows
Flung diagonally downwards through the afternoon.

This turf is not like turf:
It is a smooth dry carpet of velvet,
Embroidered with brown patterns of needles and cones.
These trees are not like trees:
They are innumerable feathery pagoda-umbrellas,
Stiffly ungracious to the wind,
Teetering on red-lacquered stems.

In the evening I listen to the winds' lisping,
While the conflagrations of the sunset flicker and clash
behind me,
Flamboyant crenellations of glory amid the charred ebony
boles.

In the night the fiery nightingales
Shall clash and trill through the silence:
Like the voices of mermaids crying
From the sea.

Long ago has the moon whelmed this uncompleted temple.
Stars swim like gold fish far above the black arches.

Far let the timid feet of dawn fly to catch me:
I will abide in this forest of pines:
For I have unveiled naked beauty,

And the things that she whispered to me in the darkness,
Are buried deep in my heart.

Now let the black tops of the pine-trees break like a spent
wave,
Against the grey sky:
These are tombs and memorials and temples and altars
sun-kindled for me.

GOLDEN SYMPHONY

I

SEEN from afar, the city
To-day is like a golden cloud:
Strayed from the sky and moulded
Into dim motionless towers.

Music is passing far off:
Music serenely
Is climbing up and vanishing
On the long grey stairways of the sky,
In fanlike rays of light.

Now it falls slowly,
Careering, toppling,
Shivering and quivering like burnished glass or
laburnum-blossom,
Golden cascades.

Peace: now let the music
Sound from further away,
Red bells out of memory's
Blue dream of regret.

Seen from afar, the city
To-day is like a fleet of sails:
Breaking the foam of dark forests,
In which I have strayed so long.

They march together slowly,
The golden temple terraces,
Against the dark remembrance
Of my pools of despair.

O golden angelus that sounded prolonging uncertain
memories,
I have seen the swallows hovering to you and followed
their dark trails of passage.

The gates of the city lie open,
And the whole world goes homeward,
Full-pulsing bells in the foreground,
Catching my soul with them
On where the sun soars broadly through the incense-
dome of the sky.

II

High chimes from the belfry;
The noonday approaches

With its golden apparel
Rustling about its feet.

High dreams of my city,
Where we, a band of brothers,
Build our proud dream of beauty
Before we fall into dust.

The golden days have come for us:
With mandolins, sword-thrusts, laughter.
Even the very dust of the street
Grows gold beneath our feet.

Bronze bell-notes poured from deep blue wells:
Molten gold out of the sky.
Pillars of yellow marble
On the summits of which the gods sleep.

Now we are swimming;
About us a great golden halo
Vibrates from us downwards,
Ebbing its life away.

Golden clouds are circling
Like angels and archangels
About the eye of the sun.

Flaming sunset:
Mad conflagrations
Licking at the earth,
The blue-black walls of space,
Iron mountains vast on the horizon.

O golden spear that dartled through the darkness!
The evening star sparkled and threw us its message.

III

In the bosom of the desert
I will lie at the last.

Not the grey desert of sand
But the golden desert of great wild grasses,
This shall receive my soul.

In the high plateaus,
The wind will be like a flute-note calling me
Day after day.

Short bursts of surf,
The wind climbs up and stops in the grass;
And the golden petals
Brush drowsily over my face.

White butterfly that flutters across my sea of golden blossom
Tell me, what are you looking for, lone white butterfly?

I am seeking for a strange lonely white flower;
Its petals are honeyless; and in the wind it is still.

White butterfly, come, fold your wings over my heart:
I am the white blossom, the white dead blossom for you.

In the golden bosom of the prairie,
I am lying at the last
Like a pool that is stilled.

But they who shared with me my life's adventure,
Who tossed their ducats like dandelions into the sunlight,
I know that somewhere they with songs are building,
Golden towers more beautiful than my own.

IV

I only know in the midnight,
Something will be born of me.

The village drowses in the darkness,
But aloft in the temple
There is a thud of gongs and a shuffle of hollow voices
In the dark corridors.

GOLDEN SYMPHONY

The golden temple
That kindled like a rose against the sunset,
Now is dark and silent,
One light glimmers from its façade.

In the inner shrine
One stiff golden curtain
Hangs from floor to roof.

Black, impassive, helmeted
In felt like stiff black warriors,
The lamas slowly gather,
Kneeling in a row.

The hollow brazen trumpets
Blare and snore.
The drums, festooned with skulls,
Roar.

Suddenly with a clash of gongs,
And a squeal from ear-splitting bugles,
The golden veil is rent.

Cavernous blue darkness!
And within it
Smiling,

Naked,
Rose-empurpled,
Rippling with crimson-violet light, behold the god.

Hail, great jewel in the lotus blossom!
Rosy flame that kindling
Flashes on the emptiness
Or Nirvana's sea!

Before the shrine, as before,
Once more the golden curtain,
And the black shapes vanish.

Aloft in the hollow temple
There is a shuffle of feet and a sound of hollow voices,
Soon lost.

The village drowses in the darkness:
Like a vast black cube
The temple looms above it,
There is no light on its façade.

Suddenly, all the golden temple
Kindles like a rose against the dawn.

I only know in the midnight
Something has been born of me.

WHITE SYMPHONY

I

FORLORN and white,
Whorls of purity about a golden chalice,
Immense the peonies
Flare and shatter their petals over my face.

They slowly turn paler,
They seem to be melting like blue-grey flakes of ice,
Thin greyish shivers
Fluctuating mid the dark green lance-thrust of the leaves.

Like snowballs tossed,
Like soft white butterflies,
The peonies poise in the twilight.
And their narcotic insinuating perfume
Draws me into them
Shivering with the coolness,
Aching with the void.
They kiss the blue chalice of my dreams
Like a gesture seen for an instant and then lost forever.

* *
*

Outwards the petals
Thrust to embrace me,
Pale daggers of coldness
Run through my aching breast.

Outwards, still outwards,
Till on the brink of twilight
They swirl downwards silently,
Flurry of snow in the void.

Outwards, still outwards,
Till the blue walls are hidden,
And in the blinding white radiance
Of a whirlpool of clouds, I awake.

* *
*

Like spraying rockets
My peonies shower
Their glories on the night.

Wavering perfumes,
Drift about the garden;
Shadows of the moonlight,
Drift and ripple over the dew-gemmed leaves.

Soar, crash, and sparkle,
Shoal of stars drifting
Like silver fishes,
Through the black sluggish boughs.

Towards the impossible,
Towards the inaccessible,
Towards the ultimate,
Towards the silence,
Towards the eternal,
These blossoms go.

The peonies spring like rockets in the twilight,
And out of them all I rise.

II

Downwards through the blue abyss it slides,
The white snow-water of my dreams,
Downwards crashing from slippery rock
Into the boiling chasm:
In which no eye dare look, for it is the chasm of death.

Upwards from the blue abyss it rises,
The chill water-mist of my dreams;
Upwards to greyish weeping pines,
And to skies of autumn ever about my heart,

It is blue at the beginning,
And blue-white against the grey-greenness;
It wavers in the upper air,
Catching unconscious sparkles, a rainbow-glint of sunlight,
And fading in the sad depths of the sky.

Outwards rush the strong pale clouds,
Outwards and ever outwards;
The blue-grey clouds indistinguishable one from another:
Nervous, sinewy, tossing their arms and brandishing,
Till on the blue serrations of the horizon
They drench with their black rain a great peak of change-
less snow.

* *
*

As evening came on, I climbed the tower,
To gaze upon the city far beneath:
I was not weary of day; but in the evening
A white mist assembled and gathered over the earth
And blotted it from sight.

But to escape:
To chase with the golden clouds galloping over the horizon:
Arrows of the northwest wind
Singing amid them,
Ruffling up my hair!

WHITE SYMPHONY

As evening came on the distance altered,
Pale wavering reflections rose from out the city,
Like sighs or the beckoning of half-invisible hands.
Monotonously and sluggishly they crept upwards
A river that had spent itself in some chasm,
And dwindled and foamed at last at my weary feet.

Autumn! Golden fountains,
And the winds neighing
Amid the monotonous hills:
Desolation of the old gods,
Rain that lifts and rain that moves away;
In the green-black torrent
Scarlet leaves.

It was now perfectly evening:
And the tower loomed like a gaunt peak in mid-air
Above the city: its base was utterly lost.
It was slowly coming on to rain,
And the immense columns of white mist
Wavered and broke before the faint-hurled spears.

I will descend the mountains like a shepherd,
And in the folds of tumultuous misty cities,
I will put all my thoughts, all my old thoughts, safely
to sleep.

For it is already autumn,
O whiteness of the pale southwestern sky!
O wavering dream that was not mine to keep!

* *
*

In midnight, in mournful moonlight,
By paths I could not trace,
I walked in the white garden,
Each flower had a white face.

Their perfume intoxicated me: thus I began my dream.

I was alone; I had no one to guide me,
But the moon was like the sun:
It stooped and kissed each waxen petal,
One after one.

Green and white was that garden: diamond rain hung
in the branches,
You will not believe it!

In the morning, at the dayspring,
I wakened, shivering; lo,
The white garden that blossomed at my feet
Was a garden hidden in snow.

It was my sorrow to see that all this was a dream.

III

Blue, clogged with purple,
Mists uncoil themselves:
Sparkling to the horizon,
I see the snow alone.

In the deep blue chasm,
Boats sleep under gold thatch;
Icicle-like trees fret
Faintly rose-touched sky.

Under their heaped snow-eaves,
Leaden houses shiver.
Through thin blue crevasses,
Trickles an icy stream.

The pines groan white-laden,
The waves shiver, struck by the wind;
Beyond from treeless horizons,
Broken snow-peaks crawl to the sea.

* *
*

Wearily the snow glares,
Through the grey silence, day after day,
Mocking the colourless cloudless sky
With the reflection of death.

There is no smoke through the pine tops,
No strong red boatmen in pale green reeds,
No herons to flicker an instant,
No lanterns to glow with gay ray.

No sails beat up to the harbour,
With creaking cordage and sailors' song.
Somnolent, bare-poled, indifferent,
They sleep, and the city sleeps.

Mid-winter about them casts,
Its dreary fortifications:
Each day is a gaunt grey rock,
And death is the last of them all.

* *
*

Over the sluggish snow,
Drifts now a pallid weak shower of bloom;
Boredom of fresh creation,
Death-weariness of old returns.

White, white blossom,
Fall of the shattered cups day on day:
Is there anything here that is not ancient,
That has not bloomed a thousand years ago?

WHITE SYMPHONY

Under the glare of the white-hot day,
Under the restless wind-rakes of the winter,
White blossom or white snow scattered,
And beneath them, dark, the graves.

Dark graves never changing,
White dream drifting, never changing above them:
O that the white scroll of heaven might be rolled up,
And the naked red lightning thrust at the smouldering
earth!

MIDSUMMER DREAMS

(Symphony in White and Blue)

I

THERE is a tall white weed growing at the top
of this sand hill:
In the grass
It is very still.

It lifts its heavy bracts of flattened bloom
Against the sky
Hazily grey with brume.

Out over yonder boats pass
And the swallows
Flatten themselves on the grass.

The lake is silvering beneath the heat.
The wind's feet
Touch lazily each crest,
Like white gulls slow flapping
To windward.

One rose white cloud slowly disengages, loosening itself,
And stands
Above the larkspur-coloured water:
Like Dione's daughter
Braiding up her wet hair with her pale hands.

II

The moon puts out her face at a rift between the trees,
Which do not lift one drooping leaf, this night of June.
There is no lazy breeze to set them clashing adrift.

Thin gleams of silver rise and break in the air,
Fireflies — here and there.

Forest of blue masses suddenly quivering with rapid points
of white,
Are the forests beneath the sea where no breeze passes
As still as you to-night?

The moon puts out her face at a rift between the trees;
Through my window, the bed cut evenly with diagonal
shafts of light,
Is a boat rocking out adrift.

Under it bend the silver tips of the dark blue coral trees,
And fireflies like glass fish
Drift and ripple upwards in the breeze.

III

We are drifting slowly, you and I,
To where the clouds are lifting
High-fretted towers in the sky:
Palaces of ivory,
Which we look at dreamily.
Over our sail
Frail white clouds,
Drift as slowly
Over the undulant pale blue silk of the water,
As we.

We are racing swiftly, you and I,
The sun darts one firm track
Through the blue-black
Of the crinkled water.
Gold spirals spattering, flashing,
The water heaves and curls away at our bow,
A mad fish splashing.

We are rocked together, you and I,
To this undulant movement.
White cloud with blue water blent,
Cloud dipping down to wave its lazy head,

Wave curling under cloud its cloudy blue.
I and you,
All alone, alone, at last.
I hold you fast.

IV

The midsummer clouds were piling up upon the south horizon,
Mountains of drifting translucence in the larkspur-fields of the sky:
Ascending and toppling in crumbled ravines, dribbling down chasms of silence,
Reassembling in crowded multitudes, massive forms one above another.
And I saw in their ridges and hollows, the appearance of a woman
Immeasurable, carven in stainless marble, motionless, naked, fair:
Her head thrown back, her pointed breasts up-gleaming in chill sunlight,
Her heavy flanks dark in the shadow, resting forever inert.
And up to her there suddenly clomb and hurried another cloud,
Huge, hairy, bulging, and knobby, with dark and knotted brows:

And he thrust out long bungling arms to her and drew himself up to her,
And I watched them melting together, blue mouth to sad white mouth.

ORANGE SYMPHONY

I

Now that all the world is filled
With armies clamouring;
Now that men no longer live and die, one by one,
But in vague indeterminate multitudes:

Now that the trees are coppery towers,
Now that the clouds loom southward,
Now that the glossy creeper
Spatters the walls like spilt wine:

I will go out alone,
To catch strong joy of solitude
Where the treelines, in gold and scarlet,
Swing strong grape-cables up the smouldering face
of the hill.

II

Guns crashing,
Thudding,
Ululating,
Tumultuous.

Guns yelping over the cracked earth,
Where dry bugles blare.

Here in this hollow
It is very quiet,
Only the wind's hissing laughter
In the place of tombs.

One by one these gaunt scarred faces
Lift up blurred wrinkled inscriptions
Silently beseeching me to stop and ponder.
What does it matter if I do not stop to read them?
No one at all has gone this way that I have chosen before.

A leaf drops slowly in silence ;
It is a long time twisting and hovering on its way to
the earth.

Guns booming,
Bellowing,
Crashing,
Desperate.
Insistent outcry of savage guns,
Rocking the gloomy hollow.

I will run out like the wind,
Snarling, with savage laughter;

Like the wind that tosses the grey-black clouds,
Against the shot-racked barrier of flaming trees.

I will race between the grey guns,
And the clouds, like shrapnel exploding,
Flinging their hail through the tumult,
Bursting, will melt in cold spray.

I am the wanderer of the world;
No one can hold me.
Not the cannon assembled for battle,
Nor the gloomy graves of the hollow,
Nor the house where I long time slumbered,
Nor the hilltop where roads are straggling.
My feet must march to the wind.

Like a leaf dropping slowly,
An orange butterfly turning and twisting,
I touch with moist passionate palms the leaden inscriptions
Of my past. Then I turn to depart.

III

The trees dance about the inn;
The wind thrusts them into flamelets.
Now my thoughts gipsying,
Go forth to strange walls and new fires.

Mouths stained with brown-red berries,
Bronzed cheeks sunken, unshaven,
Ragged attire ;
We swing our guitars at the hip
As we tramp heedless, uncaring.

In the inn the fire crackles :
On the hearth the wine is simmering.
Lift up the brown beaker one instant,
Drink deeply — fling out the last coin — let us go.
On the plains there is drooping harvest,
But no harvest can for long time hold us,
We have seen the winds, baffled,
Racing up the orange-flecked trench of the hills.

IV

On the hill summit
Where the gusty wind all night long has assailed me,
Now I see stars vanishing
Before the long cold clutching fingers of dawn.

Stars scintillant, fire-hued, metallic,
Topaz fruit of the deep-blue garden :
Southward you go, my constellations,
And leave me with the white day, alone.

ORANGE SYMPHONY

Over the hilltop
Swish with a scurry of wings
Millions of pale brown birds,
Songless, pulsing southward.

Birds who have filled the trees,
And who fled long ago at my passing,
Now you clatter in heedless tumult,
Fanning with your hot wings my face.

Carry this word to the southward;
Say that I have forgotten them that wait for me,
All the loves and the hates need expect me no longer,
In the autumn at last I am alone.

Suddenly
The wind crashes through the tree-tops,
Stripping away their orange-tiled domes;
Stark blue skeletons, forbidding
Gesticulate in my face.
You whom I planted and lavished
With all the wealth and beauty I had to bestow
Hurry away, vain harvest,
The winds' scythes can reap you,
Where you lie on the earth, and to death's barns you
can go.

Beyond the hilltop
I have seen only the sky.
The wind, naked, prodding up black-furred clouds,
Cossacks of winter.

Cry, wind,
Shriek to the shivering southland,
That I am going into winter,
That I do not hope to return.

Farewell, crowded stars,
Farewell, birds, winds, clouds and treetops,
I, weary of you all, seek my destined joy in the north-
land,
Amid blue ice and the rose-purple night of the pole.

V

Beyond the land there lies the sea;
And on the sea with wings unfurled,
Bloodily huge the sunset rests,
Feathers flickering and claws curled,
Watching to seize the ruined world.

Rolling in a torrent,
Brown leaves, my achievements,
Rise up from dark-wooded valleys

And scatter themselves on the sea;
Brown birds, my wild dreams,
Mingle their bodies together,
Shrieking and clamouring as they pass,
Black charred silhouettes
Against the west, curtained in orange flame.
Now the wind starts up
And strikes the seething water:
Hissing in uncoiled fury
Each foam-curled wave darts forward
To clash and batter
The smouldering iron-rust cliff,
Where the end of my road is lost.

Rise up, black clouds;
Pounce upon the sunset:
Tear it with your jagged teeth.
Fling yourselves, seething winds, in circles
Upon the blue-black water,
Swirl, leaves, and dance
Amid the chaos of breakers,
Flicker, birds, an instant
Against the tawny tiger throat of the sun
Which is snarling in the west.
Beat down, O great winds, westward,
Loose reins and gallop to seaward,

Rush me, too, to that ocean,
In which I have found my goal.

Lash me, lap me, rugged waves of blue-black water,
Dash me, clutch me and do not let me rest one instant;
All through the purple-blue night rock and soothe me,
Till I awaken dreamingly at the faint rose breast of the dawn.

RED SYMPHONY

I

Over the ink-black cauldron of the sea,
Heavily, on wings of leaden cloud,
Howling the sunset
Races out to assail me.

Long have I voyaged,
Night after night the grey rains swept the sea:
The heaving breakers
Hissed and quivered but held no light.

Now my voyage is ending,
White storm winds have swept bare my soul;
With their harsh laughter,
Their maddening mockery,
Their bayonet-thrusts of despair.

Over the keen, clean-swept zenith
Roll crushingly, huge masses of cloud:
Dull, ponderous, sagging with the burden
Of creaking snow.

They drop flat on the sea,
They hang menacing over me,
They festoon the sun
With swags of crimson light.

They stripe the horizon,
They bar every way with their iron tongues;
They loom weltering over my effort,
They steadfastly close me in.

Meanwhile the sun
With dying force
Wrenches one little crack
In the midst of the sagging masses,
And I steer on to it.

Like a crimson lake
The light overflows and touches the bulging surfaces
With carmine, with scarlet,
With orange, with vermillion,
With brick red, with bluish purple,
With maroon, with rose, with russet,
With savage green, with snowy blue,
With grey, with ebony, with gold.

It is the storm of the evening
That races out shrieking
To assail me,
And I hail it.

II

The sky's vast emptiness
Is crowded with fragments colliding,
Ragged, splintered masses
Swirling away to the night.

The volcano of the sun
Has burst and split its crater :
Black slag is hurled to the zenith
Above the red lava-sea.

Black shrivelled, charred fragments
Fall into the scarlet torrent :
Huge tresses of darkness sweep over my face,
Leaving me choking.

The sea is one crimson steaming fire ;
Each fanged wavelet
Flickers and dances about the one behind it,
Hungrily licking at the ship.

Fierce whirling swords,
Tossed spear-heads lancelike
Spit and stab, then suddenly fall
Leaving me there
On a rolling summit of flame, facing a gulf of despair.

The ship
Lurches
With ice-crusted prow into the wave-trough;
And rises, rapidly dripping liquid fire,
Long twisted necklaces, that burn out to green
frozen chrysolite.

III

Over my head a bell beats: it is midnight.
Perhaps I will live to the dawn.

About me are the mouths of yawning furnaces
And from these scarlet mouths the heat outpours,
And darts and licks its dry tongues at my brain
Till it, too, seems a black shell almost bursting
With the force of flame in it.

Still, wearily, I swing my shovel,
Spattering the black coal over the palates
Of the snoring mouths which rapidly swallow.
There is nothing else to do.

My legs seem melting away in sweat beneath me:
In my body my lungs and heart are fighting for air,
My eyes are seared by the appalling scarlet,
Of the furnaces about me — I scarcely see them —
My shovelfuls fall short with every swing.

Without I hear the battering of the tempest,
The ship is pounded sideways by black immeasurable wave-
thrusts,
And rising dizzily again, like a half-senseless fighter,
Is again sent downwards, by those unseen fists.

My shovel rises to the ship's slow recovery,
My shovel shoots out at the smash of toppling masses,
Sometimes I pause and pant for an endless instant,
While the ship crouches, quivering.

Over my head a bell beats: it is morning.
Wearily I drop the shovel,
And drag myself to the deck.

IV

Afar
There is something that seems a shore;
The sky has been blown clean of clouds except to westward,
And these stare hard at me, like huge sardonyx towers.

I cling to a half-shattered rail that reels and dances,
Soused by the choking water,
My face a streaming mass of blood and salt and grime,
I wait and dizzily I try to remember.

What is this city that out there awaits me?
Am I its conqueror?

Will scarlet flags hang fluttering in the streets
To greet my coming?
Will crimson lanterns
Jingle and toss in festival to-night?

Has the fire burned the ship and is the water
But stinging icy fire,
That whips and sears my face?

Down there the furnaces go out, for the water
Sloshes about the floor;
And steaming acrid fumes arise,
No living soul could stay in such a place.

Out here the decks are shattered,
The boats are shorn away,
And far on the horizon,
The city glares with its sardonyx towers.

RED SYMPHONY

Now the red bells,
The black-red bells,
The storm bells
Break loose from the horizon,
Leaping upon the eastern sea,
And breaking it in their teeth.

The towers
Infuriate, enkindle
From base to summit,
In layers, and orange terraces,
Against the blue snow haze that drifts down on them
from the east.

The ship of my soul
Is rolling to port at last,
With one clang from its heaving boilers,
One sigh from its shaking funnels,
One rattle from its loosened chains.
I will lash myself to the masthead
And wait
Empty-eyed and open-mouthed,
Till the city that is all one scarlet flame of death
Takes me to itself at last.

VIOLET SYMPHONY

I

But yesterday
Moonsails were raking high the harbour of my dreams.

Dull night of trees,
Dark sorrows drooping,
Glittering raindrops gleam on you
In recollection
Of my despair.

But yesterday
Stardust was scattered deep on the dark gulf of my dreams.

Wind of the night,
Questing, swaying, calling,
Rustle of dull grasses,
Why do you trouble me?

Yesterday
Purple mist was powdered on the windless sea of dreams.

Faces of the night that pass me,
Haggard, monotonous faces,
Windblown hair and lustful lips,
I am not what you desire.

Yesterday
One — two — sails above the mist —
Windswallows that hover
Towards the rainclouds of the horizon,
Out of the reedy harbours
Rocking, swaying, falling,
Blown to sea and parted
Yesterday,
Yesterday.

II

Purple-blue bloom of night,
Globed grapes clustered morosely
Down the dark vineyards of untrodden streets:

The noise of the moments is like the clash of the hoofs
of a horse rattling,
Thin tattoo in the stillness:
The noise of the moments takes me, uncaring,
Towards the day.

With brassy crash, dawn's corybants
Invade and trample the vineyard:
Like a faun I hide and watch them,
A dark cup in my hand.

Spoilers of my vineyard,
Spilling the lees of my sweet red wine,
You will yet ask in vain for a cup that is not yours,
A purple, dewy cup of lonely night.

Tramplers in the morning,
Sunburnt faces and weary lips.
There is yet a cup here you cannot have,
I hold it in my hands.

Would you drink of it?
Lay down your thyrse and timbrel.
Break the harsh dance that flickers through the morning,
Forget the scarlet perfumes of the day.

Remember only starless night, cool swish of many seas.

Faint pearl-glow of evening,
Cool marble in the silence:
Purple-blue grapes of night crushed freshly,
Deep sleep and the drowsy stars.

III

I love the night that in long violet shroud
Slowly and lovingly wraps up the day,
Hiding its blurred imperfections
In endless tenderness.

I love the day's
High violet cone of light,
With thin haze on the horizon
Like a wavering summer sea.

But most of all I love midsummer dawn,
When far-off planes of light ascend and tremble together
Like distant purple waves, the sound of whose dim breaking
Is lost in the wild babel of awaking birds.

IV

Twisted fragments of violet paper,
The dawn drops you
Into the green bowl filled with the day's grey waves.

I love the night's
Deep purple grapes
That yesterday
Were crushed and spilled,

SYMPHONIES

In long and sluggish rivers
That joined and made a sea,
Where, half-guessed through the mist,
Two golden sails
Drifted on silently.

The blue fume of my dreams
Is laced with violet flame.

One golden sail alone came back to rest
In its nest
Among the reeds.
The other sail is lost;
Behind the mist,
Beyond the craggy rock,
About which race in jagged white
The waves,
Horizon on horizon far away
She waits.
But through the day,
Comes no faint song, nor creaking of the ropes.

Twisted fragments of violet paper,
Charred and fallen:
Out of the green bowl lazily coils grey smoke.

GREY SYMPHONY

I

Up on the hillside a long row of larches
Shake from their grizzled beards the vestiges of rain,
From grey-blue melting ice-slabs 'neath their arches
The spring goes up again.

Writhing, exuding,
Up-steaming, streaming,
The earth is breathing to the sky
Wet clouds of spring.

Dim rosy fans, the trees
As they flick to and fro,
Seem driving greyish vapour
Over the snow.

The sky remodulates itself
From violet-grey to blue,
Under the upturned eaves of the blue larches
The sun looks through.

Now with the heat of the sun
The grey-blue ice-slabs quiver,
They slide in muddy trickles
Towards the river.

Up on the hillside between the long row of larches
Fume up from south pale clouds that bear the rain;
In pearl and violet arches
They break and shape again.

II

I have seen in the evening
The greyish-violet clouds
Roll wearily back from northward
To the place whence first they came.

One or two orange lamps burnt low
Against deep purple hills —

The wind was hurrying, bundling them together,
The pines awoke to sing
The song of the snow buzzing and screaming
On its one string.

I have seen within my heart
Crocuses, purple and gold,

Drop cold and dull and colourless
Beneath the snow.

One or two orange lamps burnt low,
Vain memories.

The wind has driven me too many winters,
My songs are snowflakes whirling about my breast.
I will wrap my frozen and bitter songs about me,
In one grey drift, and rest.

III

Fluttering and soft the snow
Flings outward, swirls and settles,
But when I try to seize it,
The wind tears it away.

Through poised green platforms of enormous pines,
I see far hilltops pushing up blue roofs.
Snow comes,
And hums
Through the woof
Of the lower branches.
It skips and dances:
It drops in sluggish folds
Of grey,

To where the frozen rhododendron bushes
With lower air-gusts play,
And the earth hushes
Its movement.

Fluttering and soft the snow is blent
In long loose spirals with my dream.

It is all I have, the snow,
And I know
That when I chase it, it will fly from me;
Beyond the lifeless green,
Beyond the low blue hills,
Beyond the pale straw-coloured glare,
Down in the west
It goes;
Straight southward where the purple-orange flare
Of sunset flows,
And into the blackened heart of my last rose
Pours its despair.

Fluttering, soft, and dim
Regrets that skip and skim
Grey in the grey twilight;
Slim and weary whirls the snow,
And where it goes I too shall go.

IV

Of my long nights afar in alien cities
I have remembered only this:
They were black scarves all dusted over with silver,
In which I wrapped my dreams;
They were black screens on which I made those pictures
That faded out next day.

Youth without glory, manhood one mad struggle,
Maturity a battle without trumpet calls:
Long gleams from pallid suns seen only in my dreaming
Struck those dissolving walls.

And of my days,
I only know
They slipped and fell,
Like too-brief sunsets,
Into the hill-ravines that held the snow.

Three lofty pines
At the corners of my heart
Waited, apart.

They only see
In the mystery
Of the grey sky,
The jaggled clouds that fly,
Endlessly.

POPPIES OF THE RED YEAR

(*A Symphony in Scarlet*)

I

THE words that I have written
To me become as poppies:
Deep angry disks of scarlet flame full-glowing in the stillness
Of a shut room.

Silken their edges undulate out to me,
Drooping on their hairy stems;
Flaring like folded shawls, down-curved like rockets starting
To break and shatter their light.

Wide-flaunting and heavy, crinkle-lipped blossom,
Darting faint shivers through me;
Globed Chinese lanterns on green silk cords a-swaying
Over motionless pools.

These are lamps of a festival of sleep held each night to
welcome me,
Crimson-bursting through dark doors.
Out to the dull, blue, heavy fumes of opium rolling
From their rent red hearts, I go to seek my dream.

II

A riven wall like a face half torn away
Stares blankly at the evening:
And from a window like a crooked mouth
It barks at the sunset sky.

And over there, beyond,
On plains where night has settled,
Tent-like encampments of vaporous blue smoke or mist
Three men are riding.

One of them looks and sees the sky:
One of them looks and sees the earth:
The last one looks and sees nothing at all.
They ride on.

One of them pauses and says, "It is death."
Another pauses and says, "It is life."
The last one pauses and says, "'T is a dream."
His bridle shakes.

The sky
Is filled with oval violet-tinted clouds
Through which the sun long settled strikes at random,
Enkindling here and there blotched circles of rosy light

These are poppies,
Unclosing immense corollas,
Waving the horsemen on.

Over the earth, upheaving, folding,
They ride: their bridles shake:
One of them sees the sky is red:
One of them sees the earth is dark:
The last man sees he rides to his death,
Yet he says nothing at all.

III

There will be no harvest at all this year;
For the gaunt black slopes arising
Lift the wrinkled aching furrows of their fields, falling away,
To the rainy sky in vain.

But in the furrows
There is grass and many flowers.
Scarlet tossing poppies
Flutter their wind-slashed edges,
On which gorged black flies poise and sway in drunken sleep.

The black flies hang
Above the tangled trampled grasses,
Grey, crumpled bundles lie in them:

They sprawl,
Heave faintly;
And between their stiffened fingers,
Run out clogged crimson trickles,
Spattering the poppies and standing in beads on the grass.

IV

I saw last night
Sudden puffs of flame in the northern sky.

The sky was an even expanse of rolling grey smoke,
Lit faintly by the moon that hung
Its white face in a dead tree to the east.

Within the depths of greenish greyish smoke
Were roars,
Crackles and spheres of vapour,
And then
Huge disks of crimson shooting up, falling away.

And I said these are flower petals,
Sleep petals, dream petals,
Blown by the winds of a dream.

But still the crimson rockets rose.
They seemed to be

One great field of immense poppies burning evenly,
Casting their viscid perfume to the earth.

The earth is sown with dead,
And out of these the red
Blooms are pushing up, advancing higher,
And each night brings them nigher,
Closer, closer to my heart.

v

By the sluggish canal
That winds between thin ugly dunes,
There are no passing boats with creaking ropes to-day.

But when the evening
Crouches down, like a hurt rabbit,
Under the everlasting raincloud whirling up the north
horizon,
Downwards on the stream will float
Glowing points of fire.

Orange, coppery, scarlet,
Crimson, rosy, flickering,
They pass, the lanterns
Of the unknown dead.

Out where the sea, sailless,
Is mouthing and fretting
Its chaos of pebbles and dried sticks by the dunes.

By the wall of that house
That looks like a face half torn away,
And from its flat mouth barks at the sky,
The sky which is shot with broad red disks of light,
Petals drowsily falling.

VI

"It was not for a sacred cause,
Nor for faith, nor for new generations,
That unburied we roll and float
Beneath this flaming tumult of drunken sleep-flowers.
But it was for a mad adventure,
Something we longed for, poisonous, seductive,
That we dared go out in the night together,
Towards the glow that called us,
On the unsown fields of death.

"Now we lie here reaped, ungarnered,
Red swaths of a new harvest:
But you who follow after,
Must struggle with our dream:

And out of its restless and oppressive night,
Filled with blue fumes, dull, choking,
You will draw hints of that vision
Which we hold aloof in silence."

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THE END

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